

ABC : A Better Chance or A Better Culture ?



A Better Chance: History & Mission

Founded in 1963 with grant from Charles E. Merrill foundation, The Rockefeller Foundation, Dartmouth College, and sixteen independent schools.

National non-profit talent search organization. ABC recruits talented students of color to place them in outstanding independent and public schools.

Mission: “... to substantially increase the number of well-educated minority youth capable of assuming positions of responsibility and leadership in American society.”

- www.abetterchance.org

ABC: Selection & Execution

Students are invited asked to apply to ABC

Acceptance based on grades, test scores, the recommendations of teachers and counselors, and their written applications.

Program hands out about 16,000 applications and they only accept about 2-3 percent of applicants.

First program to take students away from their homes, their neighborhoods, and their local high school for months and years at a time.

ABC: Selection & Execution

ABC Private vs. ABC Public

Students in the public school programs live together in a home close to their schools with a resident director and his/her family.

Private school students board at their schools.

Each public school student is also given two host families. They spend weekends doing family oriented activities.

Research Question & Thesis

Research Question:

- How have former ABC students described the program's impact on their lives?
- To what extent do they believe ABC's program culture has helped them become successful?

Thesis:

- Most students will describe the program as having an extremely positive impact on their lives. They will also argue that being exposed to the ABC program culture has helped them achieve success.

Theory:

Culture of Poverty

- Burdens of poverty faced by poor led to the creation of a subculture called culture of poverty
- Subculture has its own behaviors and attitudes and they are passed down through the socialization process thus poverty is perpetuated.
- This culture is characterized by pervasive feelings of helplessness, dependency, marginality, victimization and powerlessness.

Methods

- Prep School Sample : snowball sampling used to gather interviews from over thirty-eight graduates from class of 1966. Interviews took place between 1986 and 1988. (Domhoff and Zweigenhaft)
- Public School Sample: Palladino (2001) interviewed twelve graduates of the Clinton, New York ABC program, interviewees graduated between 1976 and 1996.

Findings: Prep School

“They did all kinds of things. Had I ever of field hockey? No. We all had to learn how to swim, we took ballet, they took us out to dinner and we had to order ourselves. Most of us had never been to a restaurant, let alone order. We had one meal a week with dress-up, and afterwards we had demitasse-I’d never had coffee, let alone had demitasse- and we’d learn how hold the cup.”

- Bobette Reed Kahn, ABC Graduate 1966

“Once, on the next to last evening, the boys were surprised to find the tutors acting as waiters and responding with mock gravity to request of every kind; there was, understandably, a little less decorum than at other evening meals, when tutors and faculty taught, by example mainly, the etiquette to be expected at their schools.”

- Domhoff & Zweigheft, 2003

“The summer program was to help correct what were thought to be social, as well as academic, deficiencies.”

- Headmaster- Andover, 1966

“They couldn’t come to Andover or Northfield from Harlem in September and fit, because many of them didn’t know a knife from a fork.”

- Headmaster- Northfield, 1966

Findings: Prep School

“The staff purposely chose activities that were common to prep school but that the ABC students were unlikely to have encountered. Every student received swimming instruction almost daily, and soccer, volleyball, canoeing, and rock climbing were the other athletic activities.”

Domhoff & Zweigenhaft, (2003)

Findings: Clinton ABC Program

Going there [Clinton High School], when I first went there I dressed in comfortable clothes, baggy clothes and then that ?. I think it lasted about two years. What else, yeah I think the way I spoke changed too. I spoke more English I guess. I ? even more sweet. ? and I, our freshman year were talking about it and were ?.

- Mark Patrick Hill (date)

I guess I was able to develop an understanding of how to interact with other people who are very different from me in terms of how we look or our backgrounds, or even how we think. So, I think I'm the kind of person who is tolerable. I don't think I'm too bad to tolerate anyone because of who they were and how they were. Just because I was exposed to more people or other people, at an early age, but being in Clinton. Now of course, I cant compare that to the range of diversity that I had in College. I believe it got me started to get used to other people.

- Carlo Williams (date)

Findings: Clinton ABC Program

I don't think it mattered where I went, I think I would have gotten the point, to some point if I didn't have the ABC program. But for someone who maybe had the abilities that any of them who went to ABC Program had but didn't have or don't have the family support, you know the having of the family structure that's in place to help them along. I think that the program should be meant for those people. People who would make it, but probably because of some problems in their environment which I think is the model on the ? for the ABC program. It's a gift people but to take ? and put them in the schools where it is more academically inclined, or in an environment where it is more academically inclined. And so I was already in an environment that was inclined academically, so I would have made it anyway.

- Carlo Williams (Date)

Findings: Clinton ABC Program

It has made me more studious and I learned that book knowledge was not as good, or not as so much good. It wasn't the same as applied knowledge. Everything I learned from my teachers and from the adults around me was, I always felt like I gained?. I learned patience; I learned how to be more methodical, not just? And dive into everything, because that's how I used to do. Just head first into everything. Some things used to be taken with precaution and what have you. It also got me involved in sports, which was better for my health because I suffer from asthma.

Dorian Hernandez

Conclusions

Cultural change occurred in both private and public school ABC program, however it was not the same.

Students who exited the program were still successful without having cultural training.

Selectivity of ABC is extremely high thus one cannot be sure these students wouldn't have succeed elsewhere.

So what?

Perhaps the most fundamental question to ask of those who are captivated with the idea that the poor have one culture and the rich another is to ask, simply, “So what?” Suppose the mythical oil millionaire behaves in an unrefined “lower class” manner, for example. What difference does that make as long as he owns the oil wells? Is the power of the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the state of legislature diminished or enhanced in any way by his taste in clothing or music? And suppose every single poor family in America set as its long-range goal that its sons and daughters would get a Ph.D-who would pay the tuition?

- William Ryan, 1971